

# First people put MPs on notice to lift their game in parliament

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Question time is never for the faint hearted, but a group of indigenous school students exploring the mechanisms of democracy in all their flawed glory found it a particularly whacky case of back to the future.

Seated in the public gallery last week for the session in which Peter Dutton described his former border security chief Roman Quaedvlieg as “Bill Shorten’s Godwin Grech”, Elyssa Clark admits she emerged more than a little bewildered.

“It was all very loud and noisy, not an appropriate manner for parliament,” the Year 11 student at St Peter’s Lutheran College in Brisbane said. “I mean, we got told to stay off our phones and not talk and yet these people are yelling at each other.”

Fortunately Elyssa and several of her peers in the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation had the opportunity to take Scott Morrison to task on how the current rabble of politics was unfolding, when they were invited to the Prime Minister’s office for a private interview.

“He did say that it’s been so disruptive and that the political situation in the past 10 years has been more tumultuous than in the previous 40 years, and that he wants it to return to stability,” she revealed afterwards.

“And he said that on the anniversary of the September 11 attacks in New York and on the Pentagon, we’ve got to make sure we create a safe community, and



GARY RAMAGE

Jack Mudge, Kodie Mason, Scott Morrison, Matthew McDonald and Elyssa Clark in the Prime Minister’s office



that safety extends to economic security for families.”

Elyssa was with a group of about 70 students on an annual work experience week put on for the foundation’s highest achievers, designed to help them learn about careers in government and the public service.

And she might not have gotten the Home Affairs Minister’s reference to Grech — the public servant at the heart of the Ute-gate allegations which embroiled both Kevin Rudd’s and Malcolm Turnbull’s leadership in 2009 — but as the foundation’s chief executive Andrew Penfold pointed out, there was a direct historical link for the visitors.

“We had a similar group in Kevin Rudd’s office just before he

lost his job in 2010, which is a reminder of how close to the big historical moments they can sometimes get on these trips,” Mr Penfold said. “It would have been amongst one of Rudd’s last meetings in his office, and (last week’s was) among Morrison’s first.”

Also visiting the office of Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion, Elyssa said she was impressed by “how passionate he was about indigenous people; he did mention the culture and connection they have and also that because of this they’re more suitable to having a role in his office”.

The youngest of nine siblings from an East Palmerston family, she’s lining herself up for tertiary qualifications in nursing and midwifery after graduating, but was also looking forward to a visit to the Australian Defence Force Academy.

“I do want to work in the army, to step up and make sure the country’s safe,” she said.